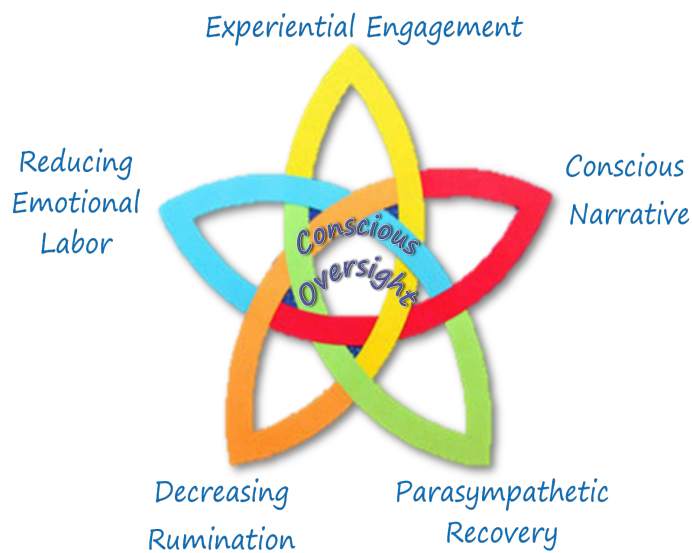


# CE-CERT

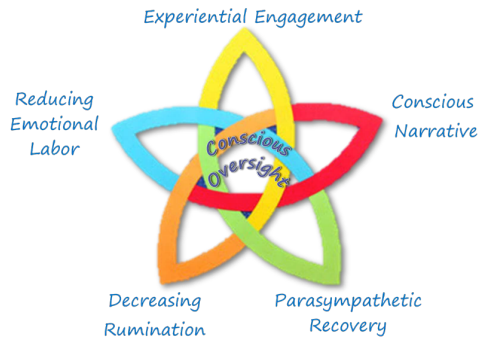


Components for  
Enhancing Clinician  
Experience And  
Reducing Trauma

## Skills for Sustaining a Career in the Helping Professions

\*Thanks to Dr. Susan Schmidt for the  
original version of this handout.

# Overview of CE-CERT



- The CE-CERT model synthesizes a set of skills that can be acquired with intention, practice, and coaching.
- The focus is not upon “self-care” strategies that can be done after work, but rather, emphasizes strategies for *changing the experience of doing our work in real time*.

## Skill Domain 1: Experiential Engagement Learning how to “avoid avoidance”

The goal is to open up to the full emotional experience of trauma work.

- Emotions can be experienced without damage.
- Even intense, negative feelings are not traumatizing.
- Secondary trauma occurs when we are “swamped”: When we feel overwhelmed or helpless.

“What are you going to do with the emotional pain that comes with your work?”

(Harry Spence, quoted by van Dernooot Lipski)

## The Skills for Experiential Engagement

1. Intention: Setting a deliberate goal of willingness to experience aversive, even intense feelings
2. Awareness: Developing patterns of continuously checking in with yourself “What am I feeling”?
3. Identifying: Self-auditing the situations, client types, or feelings that you may be inclined to avoid
4. Allowing: Mindful awareness of feelings without reactivity-- not trying to get rid of, avoid, or change what we feel

## Skill Domain 2: Reducing Rumination

### Learning how to “leave the moment in the moment”

- Emotions—even intense emotions—are quickly metabolized.
  - But our thoughts can regenerate endlessly.
  - Rumination—recirculating thoughts about events—is not caused by allowing yourself to feel too much.
  - Ruminations are caused by recreating images of distressing events (our thoughts, not our feelings).

#### The Skills for Reducing Rumination

1. Intention: Give yourself permission to let go, to not try to hold on to feelings of compassion;
2. Acknowledge to yourself when you are ruminating (it sometimes seems like we are problem-solving). Label it.
3. (When ruminating) intentionally avoid mind-wandering (default mode).

4. Deliberately involve yourself in an absorbing activity (task positive). Breaking the thought-feeling loop for as little as two minutes can be effective.
- a. Conversation—“get outside your own thoughts”, interpersonal connection results in parasympathetic engagement
  - b. Activity—exercise, hobby, cooking, any activity that is absorbing, e.g., holds the attention away from the self (and the object of the rumination);
  - c. For nighttime ruminations, mentally prepare a plan relating to the situation about which you are ruminating. The plan should follow the ACES: Action-oriented, Concrete, Experiential, and Specific. Then gently remind yourself you have done all that you need to do.

“Teach us to care and  
not to care”.

T.S. Elliot

# Skill Domain 3: Conscious Narrative: Directing the Story We Tell Ourselves About Our Work

Our narratives include what we tell ourselves:

- Before an experience (the antecedent narrative)
- During the experience (the concurrent narrative)
- After an intense experience (the consolidation narrative)

With deliberateness, we can direct our story in ways that sustain our careers.

Do you believe that your work is enjoyable and meaningful, or that it is aversive and unsustainable? **Either way, you are right.**

Elements of a career-sustaining narrative:

I. Antecedent Narrative:

1. Personal meaning of the work
2. Opening up to experience

II. Concurrent Narrative:

1. Mastery: "I know how to handle this..."
2. Willingness: "Even though this is uncomfortable, I am willing to feel this..."

3. Equanimity: Willingness to stop trying to fix that which cannot be fixed, and merely to be a kindly presence for your client.
4. Stress mindset: Interpreting stress as a demand for action rather than something to be avoided. E=motion

### III. Consolidation Narrative:

1. I can now tell the story of that experience in the context of my career of advancing competency.
2. Next time, I know what to do.

“The greatest weapon we have against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”

William James

The greatest weapon we have against job stress is our ability to choose one story over another.”

# Skill Domain 4: Reducing Emotional Labor: Making the Job Easier

Emotional Labor: The process of regulating experienced and displayed emotions to present a professional desired image during interpersonal transactions at work.

- When the experienced and displayed emotions match, the work gets easier.

The skills for reducing emotional labor:

## I. Compassion as skill

A. Intention: Radical Compassion

B. What am I feeling towards this client (really)?

C. Curiosity and model of mind

D. Use of Behavioral Strategies

E. Move to genuine expression of feelings “artful surfacing”

## II. Wholeheartedness

Not doing anything different, just putting all of your thoughts, feelings, and efforts into one purpose

## III. Intentional Learning

A. Converting our energy-draining tasks into skills challenges

B. Personal accomplishment mediates burnout



# Skill Domain 5: Parasympathetic Recovery: Skills for Breathing Throughout the Day

Parasympathetic Recovery: Paying attention to our well-being and work strain on a continuous basis and responding in the moment by intentionally rebalancing.

## The Skills and Practices

### I. Cognitive Breathing: Breathing Space During the Workday

#### A. Team Support

a) Every difficult case is help by each of us and all of us

b) "Nested mentalization"

2. 5 min. movement/hour

3. No more "sad desk lunches"

4. Team Culture of Acknowledging distress

5. End of day "soft transition"

# The Skills and Practices

## II. "Practice in Your Practice"

- a) Homeostasis (Constant re-balancing)
- b) Conscious oversight of your level of distress
  - Check-in with self
  - Acknowledging distress
- c) "Dropping Anchor" when distressed (What is your go-to?)

## III. Stress Hardiness

- Goal of at least 20 mins. In "absorbing activity" each day
- This is a time of recovery to baseline (out of fight/flight)